Western Washington is First to Respond

In early 2020 the COVID-19 virus silently infiltrated western Washington. No one could predict the devastation the pandemic would bring to our communities, the country, the globe. A once-in-a-lifetime pandemic disrupted the economy, education systems, healthcare community, and daily lives of more than 330 million Americans.

Food Lifeline assumed a leadership role alongside our national partner Feeding America, the largest hunger relief organization in the United States to mobilize action. Massive lay-offs left 1.6 million people throughout Washington experiencing hunger and food insecurity, doubling the need for food assistance essentially overnight. The hunger relief system was upended. Recovery for those experiencing hunger and food insecurity is expected to take three to five years.

Statewide Hunger Relief Effort Forms

Addressing the magnitude of the crisis demanded a comprehensive approach. It would take state and federal government assistance, collaboration between non-profit hunger relief organizations, and the commitment of the vibrant northwest culture of philanthropy to face the crisis head on.

This coalition, born out of crisis, illuminates the northwest’s deep commitment to our neighbors in need. The collective spirit and heart of our community created an outpouring of support on a once unimaginable scale. Between government grants and contracts, and donations by individuals and collective groups, Food Lifeline has purchased more than $20,000,000 in food to close the gap for families facing hunger and food insecurity in western Washington since the onset of the pandemic.
INSPIRED INNOVATION

Learning in real time, Food Lifeline quickly formulated a plan with our local partners and community stakeholders to provide contactless community food distributions that would get food into the hands of the individuals who needed it most. Working with shopping malls, sports venues, community colleges, and community centers we popped-up food distributions at seven sights throughout Puget Sound.

We worked with our 350 food pantry and meal program partners to create alternative access to our food bank supply, while they mobilized their local communities and volunteers to create home delivery and socially distanced options for neighbors needing assistance. While demand doubled, food donations dried up. Traditionally, 85% of Food Lifeline’s food resources are secured through donations.

LESSONS FROM THE LAST YEAR:

Our guiding principles have long anchored us in the dual purpose of our mission - to feed people facing hunger today, while investing time and resources into solving hunger for tomorrow. However, the pandemic painted an undeniably clear picture about the root causes of hunger - poverty, racial inequity and social injustice.

Black, Indigenous, migrant, refugee, and communities of color are experiencing twice the rate of hunger and food insecurity as the general population.

Gains in employment are skewed almost entirely toward households making $75,000 and above, while lower income families, and women-led households have been left behind.

Research shows that seven counties in our region experience much higher need and have far less readily available, non-governmental access to food assistance.

Capital improvements must be made in our warehouse, transportation and logistics in order to support expanded services.

Food expense budgets must be stabilized by re-establishing a high percentage of food resources from donated food streams;

To Root Out Hunger, we must frame our recovery with a focus on the underlying causes of hunger and our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of our work.
OUR WORK IS NOT DONE

To inspire a social movement aimed at ending hunger, we must harness the spirit and energy this community demonstrated throughout the pandemic. We must relentlessly advocate for policy changes that root out poverty, racial inequity and social injustice so that all people have an equitable opportunity to live, work, and thrive with dignity in their communities.

In the next three years, as we move toward recovery we will:

Grow our network of support with groups that put the community’s needs before all else. We will partner with more BIPOC-led organizations that serve communities of color. We will prioritize new agencies that pose few to no barriers to access for the people they serve, while maintaining quality and food safety standards.

Invest additional financial resources and program innovation in seven priority counties that are most impacted by food insecurity: King, Snohomish, Pierce, Skagit, Pacific, Mason and Lewis.

Prioritize resourcing culturally appropriate foods to meet the needs of various ethnic, religious, and culturally diverse communities we serve.

Amplify the dignity and agency of our clients and partners, centering their voices and lived experiences with positive, inclusive regard for their humanity.

Financially invest in our redistribution organization (RDO) network with pass-through grants to improve the hunger relief system while providing stable access to nutritious food throughout our 14 county service area.

Make capital investments in expanding our Cooler/Freezer capacity as well as optimize the warehouse facility to improve efficiency and accommodate the increased demand produced by the pandemic.

Lean into rooting out hunger, by advocating for policies to secure housing rights, fair wages, health care, and the social safety net. Continue to build relationships across sectors, to strengthen community resilience and reduce disparities.

DONATE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
Food Lifeline is on a mission to end hunger, and we need your help. This summer, the number of people experiencing hunger continues at crisis levels. **People of color, migrants, Indigenous populations, and refugees experience food insecurity at double the rate of the general population and 40% of the clients were first time food bank visitors.**

At the root of these disparities are poverty, inequity, and social injustice. For us all to thrive, we must create a more equitable approach to ready access to nutritious food.

**AGENCY PARTNER IMPACT**

82,999,232 pounds of food distributed

66,399,386 number of meals provided

**COMMUNITY DISTRIBUTIONS DIRECT TO CLIENTS:**

7 locations

84,774 families served

5.73 million pounds of food

3+ million pounds of fresh produce

4.5+ million meals provided

56 new partners

815 S 96th St. Seattle, WA 98108
foodlifeline.org (206) 545-6600

Feeding people facing hunger today, solving hunger for tomorrow.